

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 8, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

Thank you for your continued work to protect our oceans and seafood industry. We write to request your assistance in addressing the issue of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and forced labor in the seafood sector.

IUU fishing puts U.S. fishermen at a disadvantage by allowing illegally sourced seafood to be sold in the U.S. Although many federal agencies are working to address aspects of these interconnected challenges, centralized vision, direction, and leadership are needed to compel federal agencies to use their full authorities in creative and effective ways to end IUU fishing. Doing so would protect workers and ensure all seafood sold in the United States is safe, legally caught, responsibly sourced, and accurately labeled.

Congress recognized the need for a whole-of-government approach to this issue in December 2019 when it passed the Maritime SAFE Act (included in P.L. 116-92). That law established the U.S. Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing to address all aspects of IUU fishing. In 2016, the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act repealed the “consumptive demand” loophole in the Tariff Act of 1930, allowing U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to enforce U.S. law prohibiting the importation of all goods produced with forced labor (P.L. 114-125).

The upcoming Our Ocean Conference, hosted by the Republic of Palau and co-hosted by the United States, will provide a unique opportunity to emphasize U.S. leadership in fighting IUU fishing and forced labor on a global stage. Despite progress to improve global fisheries management, IUU fishing continues to undermine national security, food security, and human rights. The U.S. International Trade Commission estimates that the United States imported \$2.4 billion in seafood derived from IUU fishing in 2019. International IUU fishing and human and labor rights abuses in the seafood sector create unfair competition for American fishermen, who operate under strong domestic conservation and labor laws. Such abuses are also driving declines in fisheries populations—which face a host of unprecedented challenges, including changing ocean conditions—directly harming workers and food security globally.

With the return of the Our Ocean Conference, the United States has the opportunity to build on the work of the Task Force and the Maritime SAFE Act, including by adding protections for vulnerable people in the seafood industry. As one of the world’s largest economies and importers of seafood, the U.S. has substantial influence in ending the use of forced labor in the international seafood supply chain. By supporting greater transparency and making better use of existing data, the Departments of Commerce, Homeland Security, Justice, Labor, State, and

Treasury, and other agencies can strengthen U.S. government accountability for those who exploit or profit from human trafficking in the seafood industry. We urge you to continue White House leadership in combatting IUU fishing and forced labor by facilitating coordinated traceability and enforcement efforts.

We look forward to working with you to bring agencies together to address these pressing issues.

Thank you for your timely consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin L. Cardin". The script is cursive and fluid.

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roger F. Wicker". The script is cursive and fluid.

Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator